DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 114 159 PS 008 045

AUTHOR Sawin, Douglas B.; And Others
TITLE Privacy in the Home: A Developmental and Situational Analysis.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Denver, Colorado, April 10-13, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Child Rearing; *Children; Demography; *Family Environment; *Family Life; Middle Class Culture; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Child Relationship; Sex (Characteristics); Sex Differences; Social Development; *Socialization
IDENTIFIERS *Privacy

ABSTRACT

This report presents descriptive data on developmental and situational factors related to children's use of privacy rules and privacy makers in their homes. Subjects were 112 children ranging in age from 2 to 17 years from 48 middle-class families. Data related to the use and regulation of bedrooms and bathrooms by specified family members was obtained by questionnaires and analyzed. Results show privacy to be a developmental variable, different for boys and girls and for situations involving different activities. The socialization of girls' privacy habits in regard to their fathers begins quite early, and socialization of boys' privacy habits occurs later and is less specific to the sex of their parent. Different rates of maturation may also play a role. As privacy behaviors increase with age, they become more discriminating in terms of the type of personal activity involved. These develcpmental patterns are viewed as a function of the on-going socialization of children's privacy habits, the emergence of the more obvious secondary sex characteristics, and children's increasing awareness of other persons' awareness of them. Other factors found to be determinants of children's privacy were: size of the home, family density (family size within home size), and (3) maternal child rearing attitudes. (Author/BRT)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED114159

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Privacy in the home: A developmental and situational analysis

Douglas B. Sawin, Ross D. Parke, and Sue Dimiceli

Fels Research Institute
Yellow Springs, Ohio

PS 008045

Paper presented at the Biennial Meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, Denver, Colorado, April, 1975.

00002

Privacy in the Home:
A developmental and situational analysis

Douglas B. Sawin, Ross D. Parke, and Sue Dimiceli

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in the interaction between man's physical environment and his social behavior (Altman, 1973; Ittelson, Proshansky, Rivlin, & Winkel, 1974; Moos & Insel, 1974). In studies involving children, this interest has been reflected in research on crowding (Loo, 1973; McGrew, 1972), adult reactions to children's invasion of their personal space (Fry & Willis, 1971), children's interpersonal distancing (Aiello & Jones, 1971; Evans & Howard, 1973; Pedersen, 1973), and patterns of space utilization among institutionalized children (Wolfe & Rivlin, 1972). Surprisingly, there has been relatively little research concerning patterns of space utilization among family members in the physical context of the home (Altman, Nelson, & Lett, 1972), and no data concerning how the home environment is utilized to establish and maintain personal space and privacy. Though some attention has been paid to children's conceptions of privacy (Wolfe & Laufer, 1974), neither the rules which regulate privacy in the home situation, nor the manner in which privacy is achieved in home contexts have been investigated. The purpose of this report is to present descriptive data on the developmental and situational factors that are related to children's use of privacy rules and privacy markers in the regulation of family members' access to personal space areas of the home environment.

Privacy was operationalized for this research as the extent to which access to space in the home environment was limited by the principal occupant of that space. We examined children's use of physical markers (e.g., closed doors)

and social rules (e.g., knocking requirements, access restrictions) to a ve privacy in their bedrooms and bathrooms. In addition to examining privacy a function of age, physical maturation, and sex, several modifying situational and socialization variables were examined: These are age and sex of person seeking access, activities being engaged in, size of home, size of family, family density and maternal child rearing practices.

The subjects were 112 children ranging in age from 2 to 17 years who were from 48 middle-class families participating in the Fels Longitudinal Study. The data regarding privacy habits in the home were obtained by a questionnaire adapted from an earlier version by Altman, Nelson, and Lett (1972). The questionnaire consisted of items dealing with the use and regulation of various rooms in the house. Questions concerning the bedroom and bathroom are relevant to this paper. For both rooms, the following information was secured: (1) use of the rooms by family members, (2) door practices (open vs. closed), (3) door knock rules, and (4) access rules. Specification of the age and sex of both the occupant and individual seeking access were noted for each case. The time required to complete the questionnaire was approximately 35-40 minutes.

The questionnaire was sent to the families and returned by mail. A separate section on bedroom and bathroom practices was filled out for each child. Parents were informed that the questionnaire concerned "ways in which space in your home is typically organized and used." Return rate was 85%. There was no systematic bias in terms of family type among the non-participants. An effort was made to insure an approximately even distribution of respondents at each age of child level and for sex of child.

The items of primary interest for this report are the questions concerning the child's use of closed doors as privacy markers, use of knock rules for parents and siblings and whether other family members were permitted access to the child's bedroom and bathroom.

The responses to the items were treated as binary variables and were submitted to analyses of variance or point bi-serial correlational analyses. Only a sample of the findings will be presented in this first report, though all of the findings reported here are significant at the $p<.05$ level or less.

Children's chronological age was consistently related to their use of closed doors, knock rules and access limitations. This was true in both the bedroom and the bathroom (Fig.1), and for parents as well as siblings (Fig. 2). On these graphs note that the greatest jump in restricted bathroom access occurs during early adolescence. While there are several possible explanations for increases in privacy occurring at this time in children's lives, we felt that one of these was surely children's physical maturity -- especially the appearance of secondary sex characteristics. With this hypothesis in mind we examined the Fels Physical Growth Data for the children between 9 and 16 years of age and found that increasing physical maturity in adolescence as measured by skeletal age with chronological age partialled out, was significantly correlated with greater use of privacy, particularly in the bathroom. For example, while engaged in personal bathroom activities, more physically mature adolescents keep the bathroom door closed ($r=.29$) and are more likely to restrict the access of other family members (e.g., mother not allowed in bathroom while child is bathing; $r=.38$).

It had been expected that girls would be more private than boys. In general, however, the differences between boys' and girls' use of privacy were consistently significant only when the sex of the person seeking access and the age of the children are also considered (Fig. 3).

Fig. 1

CLOSED DOORS X AGE

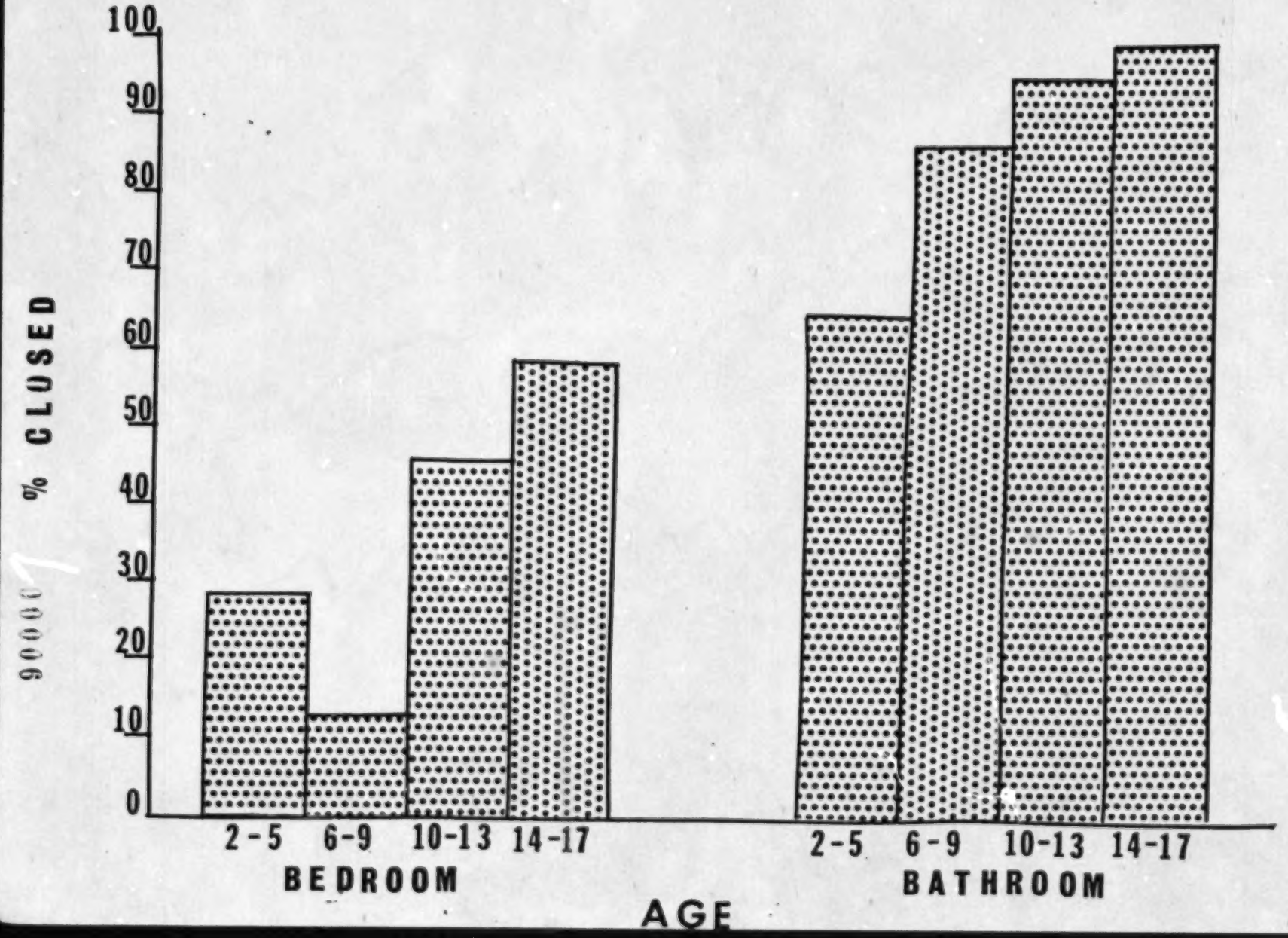


Fig. 2

RESTRICTED BATHROOM ACCESS X AGE

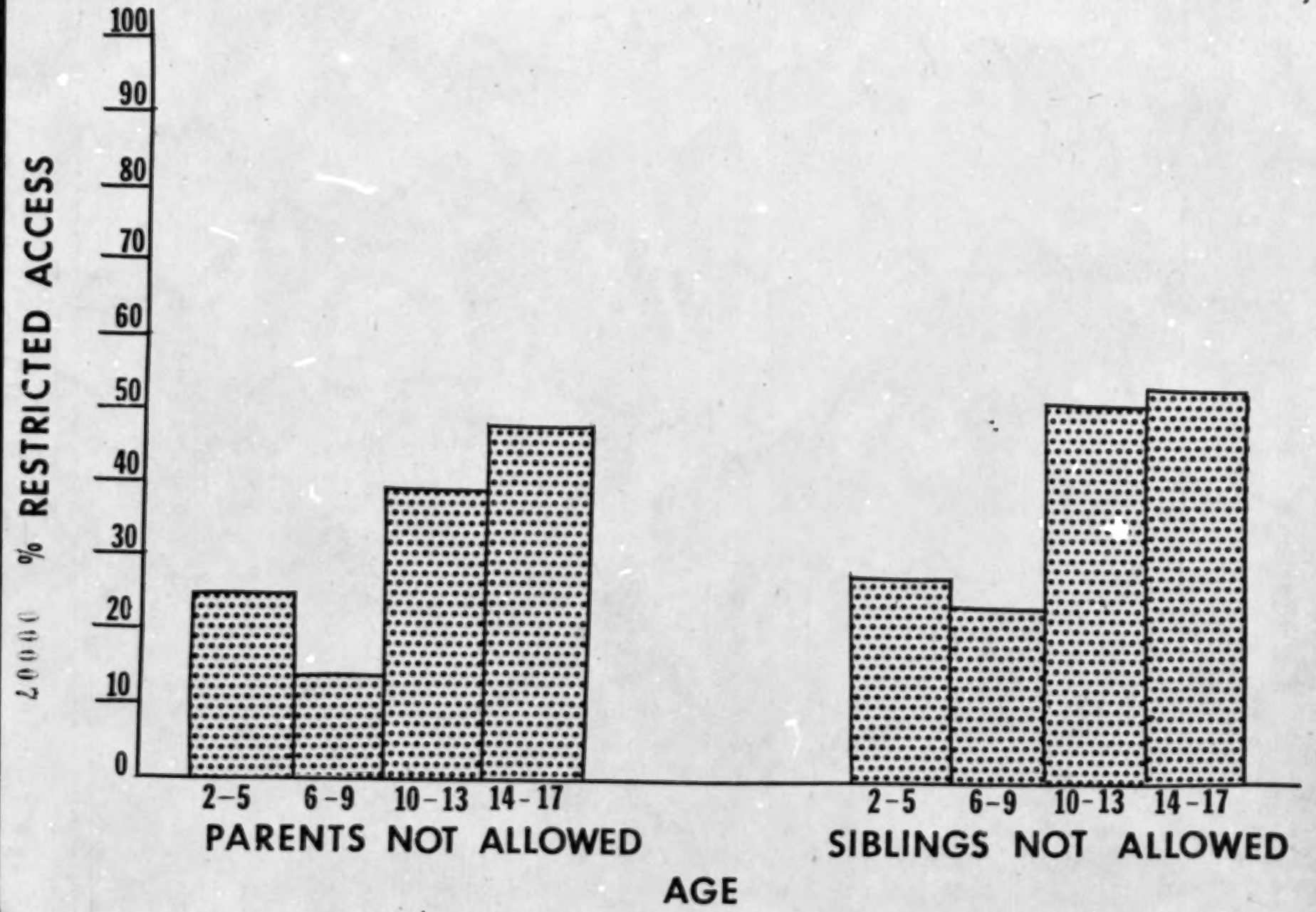
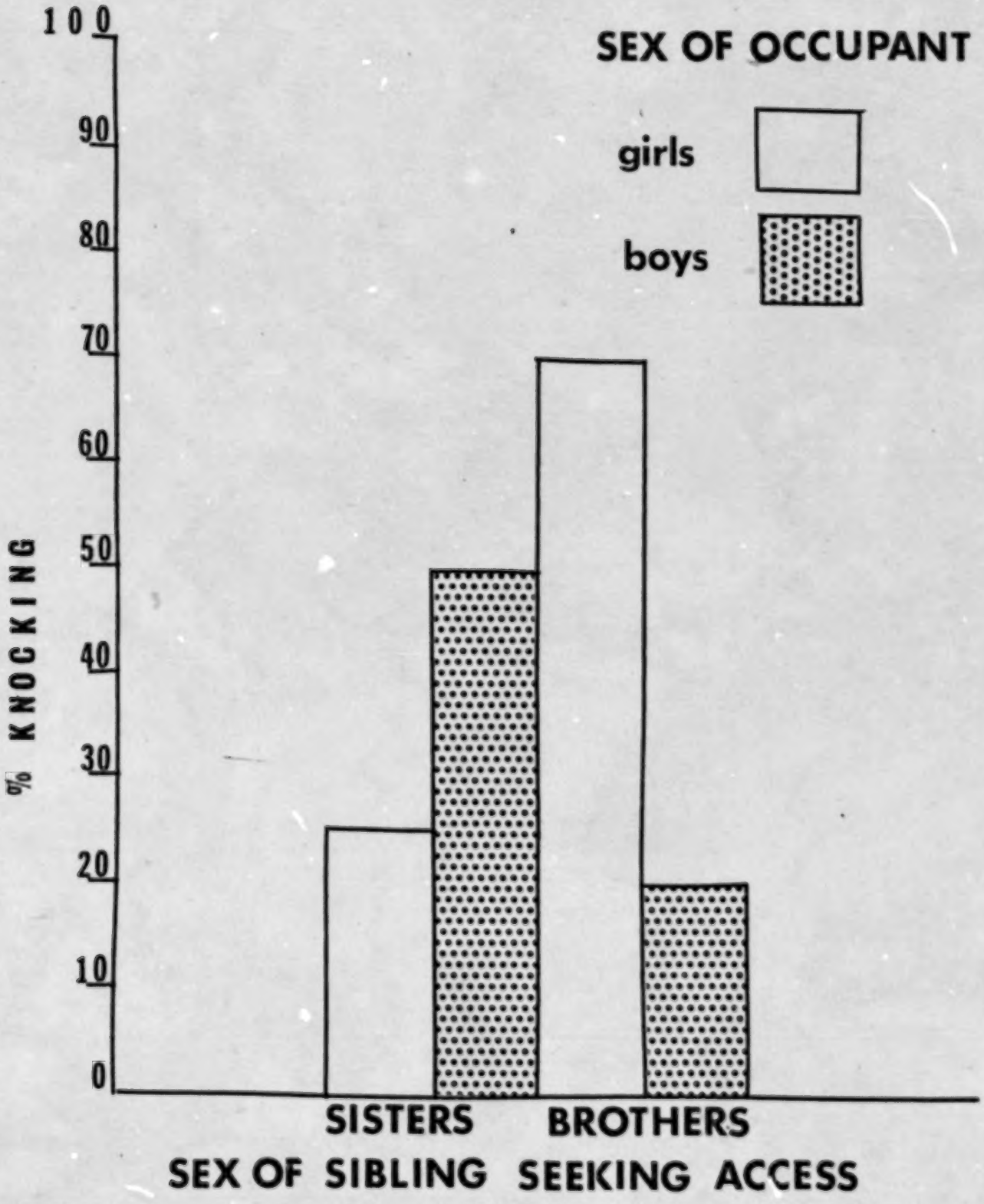


Fig. 3

BEDROOM DOOR KNOCKING X SEX X SIBLING



For parents' knocking on their children's bedroom doors (see Fig. 4), the highest incidence of knocking is for fathers on their daughter's bedroom doors, while knocking on their son's doors is less frequent and similar for fathers and mothers. Mothers appear to make little distinction between sons and daughters in their knocking on bedroom doors, but knock more frequently on sons' bathroom doors than on daughters'.

Access to the bathroom shows similar cross-sex interaction effects (see Fig. 5). While children are engaged in personal bathroom activities, access to their bathroom is restricted most frequently for brothers and fathers by girls and for sisters and mothers by boys. When the same sex sibling or parent is seeking access, restrictions are less prevalent. These cross-sex interaction effects showed developmental trends as well. We found that the greatest increase in the percentage of girls reporting restricted access for fathers was in the age range from 10 to 13, while the greatest increase in the percentage of boys reporting exclusiveness occurred during the age range from 14 to 17, at which time boys become as exclusive with both parents as older girls are with their fathers.

Another modifier of children's privacy behavior is the type of activity being engaged in while privacy is being sought (see Fig. 6). The effects of this factor, too, showed age related trends. For example, younger children (2-5) appear to make few distinctions among bathroom activities in establishing bathroom access patterns for parents. In contrast, among older adolescents (14-17) bathroom access restrictions are most frequently imposed during toilet use, somewhat less frequently during bathing and dressing, and most infrequently while grooming.

In general then, our findings indicate that privacy is a developmental variable, that the course of development is different for boys and girls, and for situations involving different activities. When the development of privacy behaviors is considered in the context of parent-child dyads, it appears that the

Fig. 4 KNOCKING X SEX X PARENTS

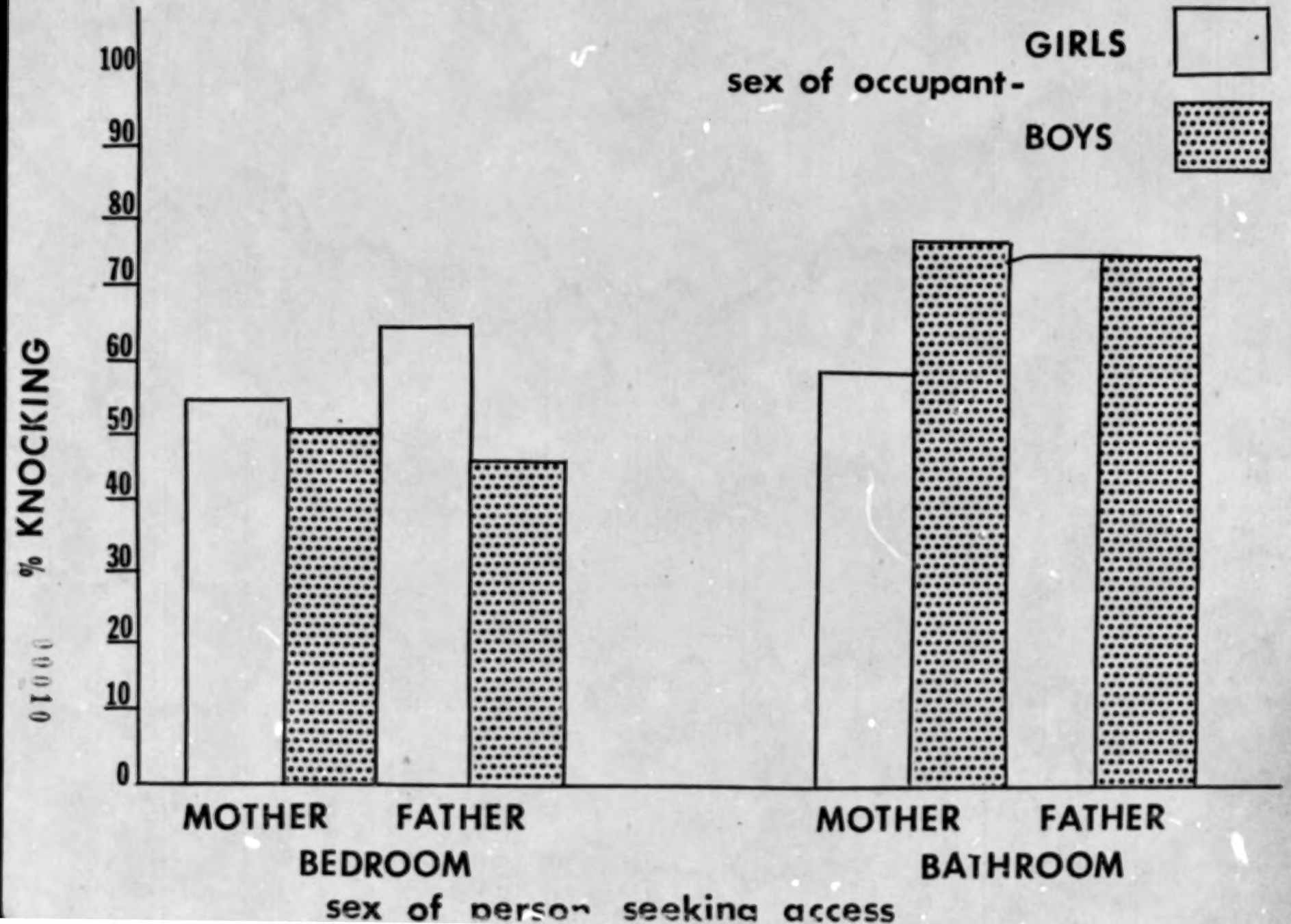


Fig.5 RESTRICTED BATHROOM ACCESS X SEX

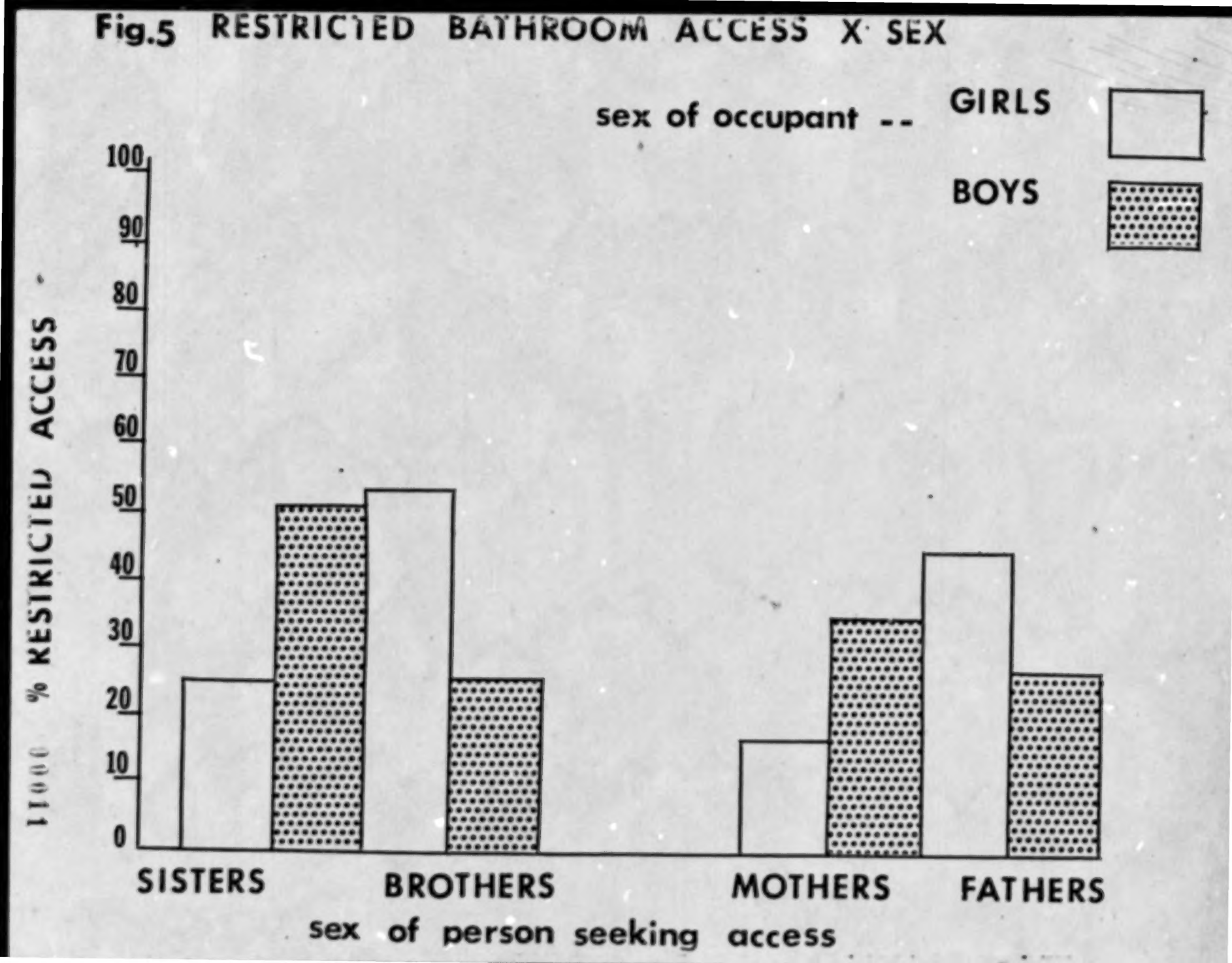
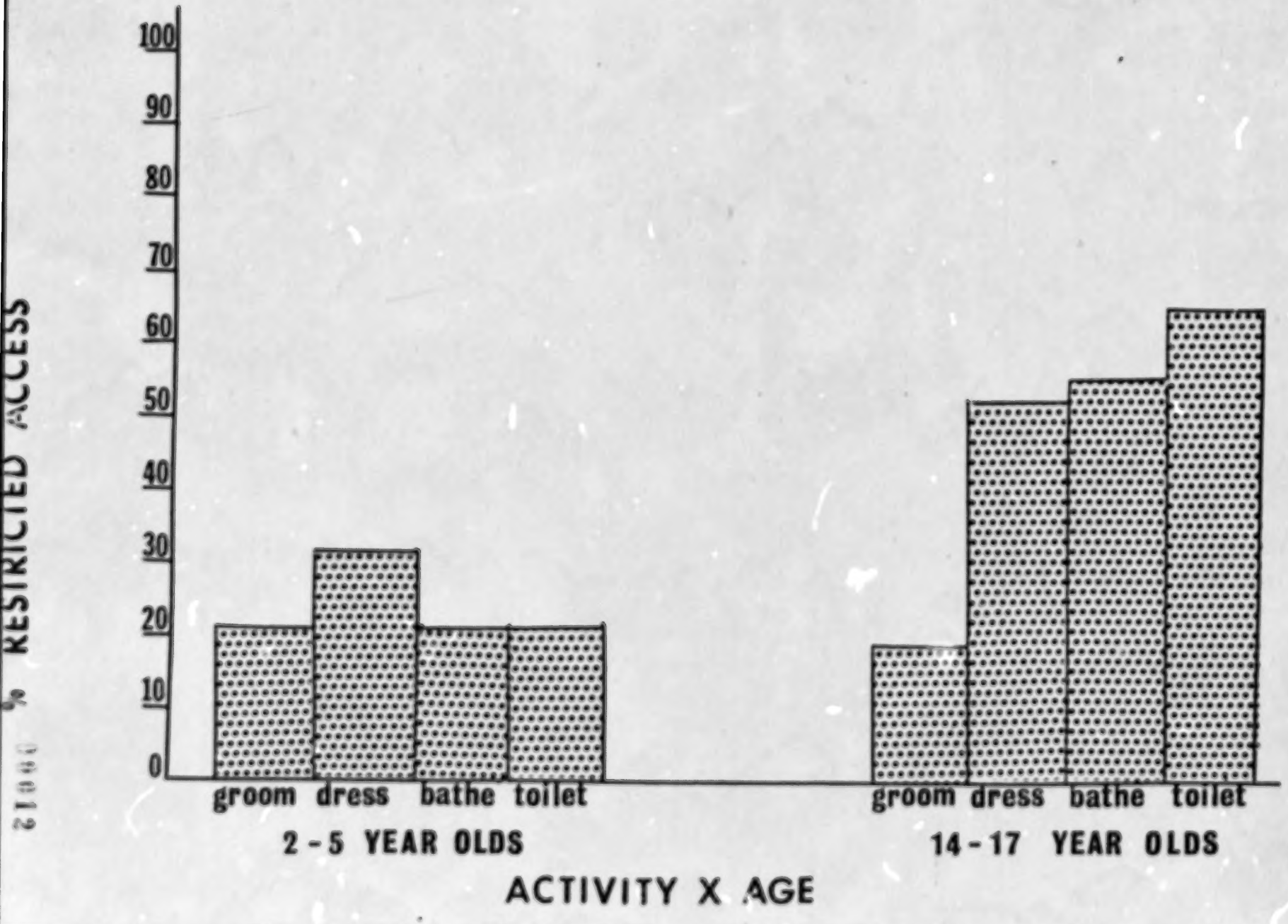


Fig. 6 RESTRICTED ACCESS X ACTIVITY X AGE



socialization of girls' privacy habits in regard to their fathers begins quite early, and that the socialization of boys' privacy habits occurs later and is less specific to the sex of his parent. Different rates of maturation may also play a role in these sex and age interactions. Secondly, as privacy behaviors increase with age, they become more discriminating in terms of the type of personal activity involved. We view these developmental patterns as a function of the on-going socialization of children's privacy habits, of the emergence of the more obvious secondary sex characteristics, and of children's increasing awareness of other persons' awareness of them.

Several other factors proved to be determinants of children's privacy. The size of the home is one of these (Fig. 7). Though we had expected greater privacy in smaller homes, we found that the proportion of children reporting keeping their bedroom and bathroom doors closed was positively related to the number of rooms in the house. This association was found for other physical space variables as well. It appears, then that less privacy is afforded children in smaller homes with fewer facilities.

Family size was also examined, but unexpectedly, failed to yield consistent associations with privacy. However, a variable we derived from family size and home size that we labeled Family Density (see Fig. 8) was found to be an important determinant of privacy. First, we defined Family Density in the following way:

Low Density = smaller familles in larger homes

Moderate Density = smaller families in smaller homes
larger families in larger homes

High Density = larger families in smaller homes.

As can be seen in Figure 9, there is a U-shaped curvilinear relation between family density and children's privacy. Higher levels of restricted bathroom access were reported by children in low and in high density homes and fewer bathroom access restrictions were reported by the children in moderately dense homes. This relationship suggests that both the amount of space available in

Fig. 7

CLOSED DOORS X SIZE OF HOME

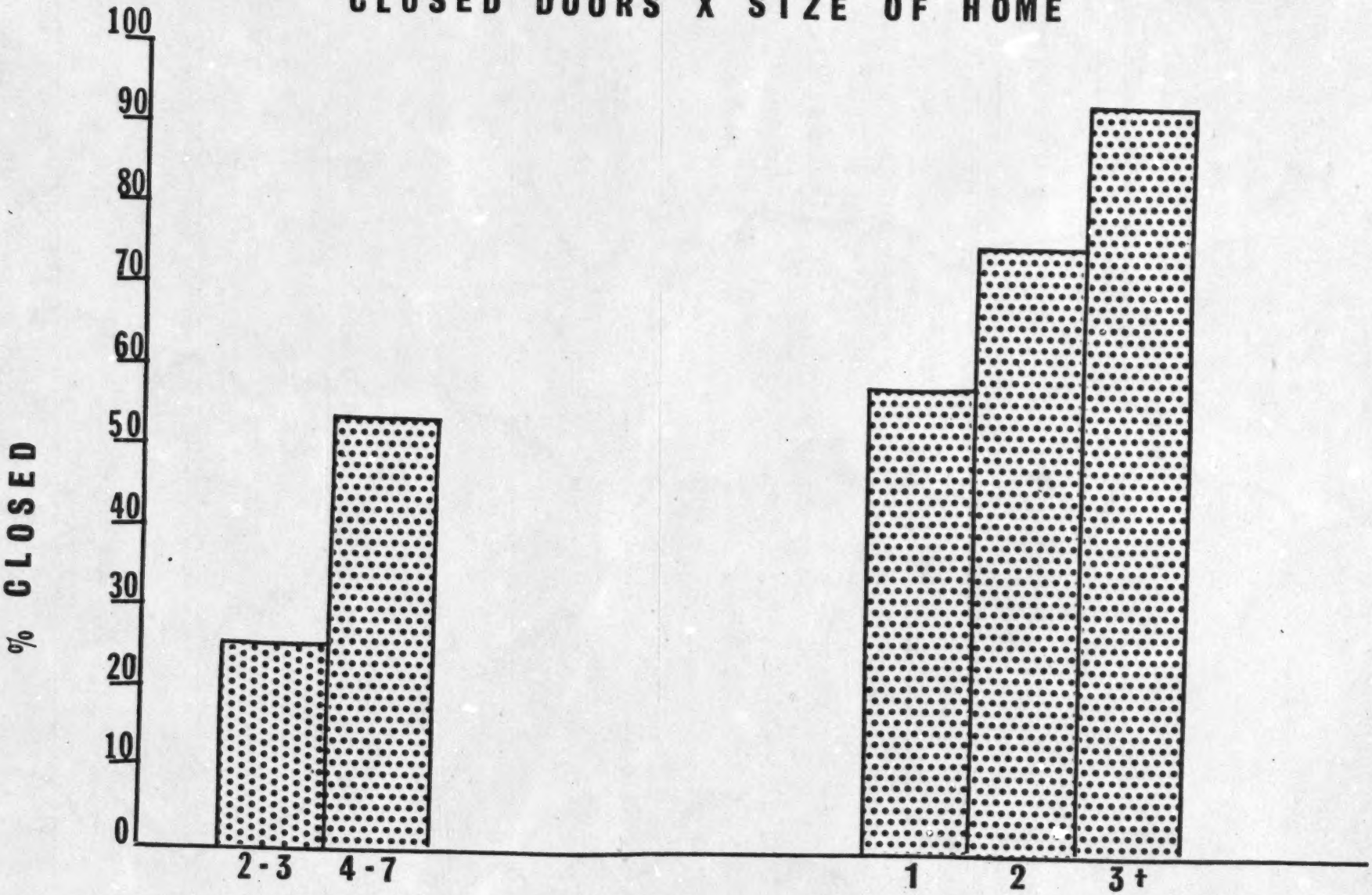


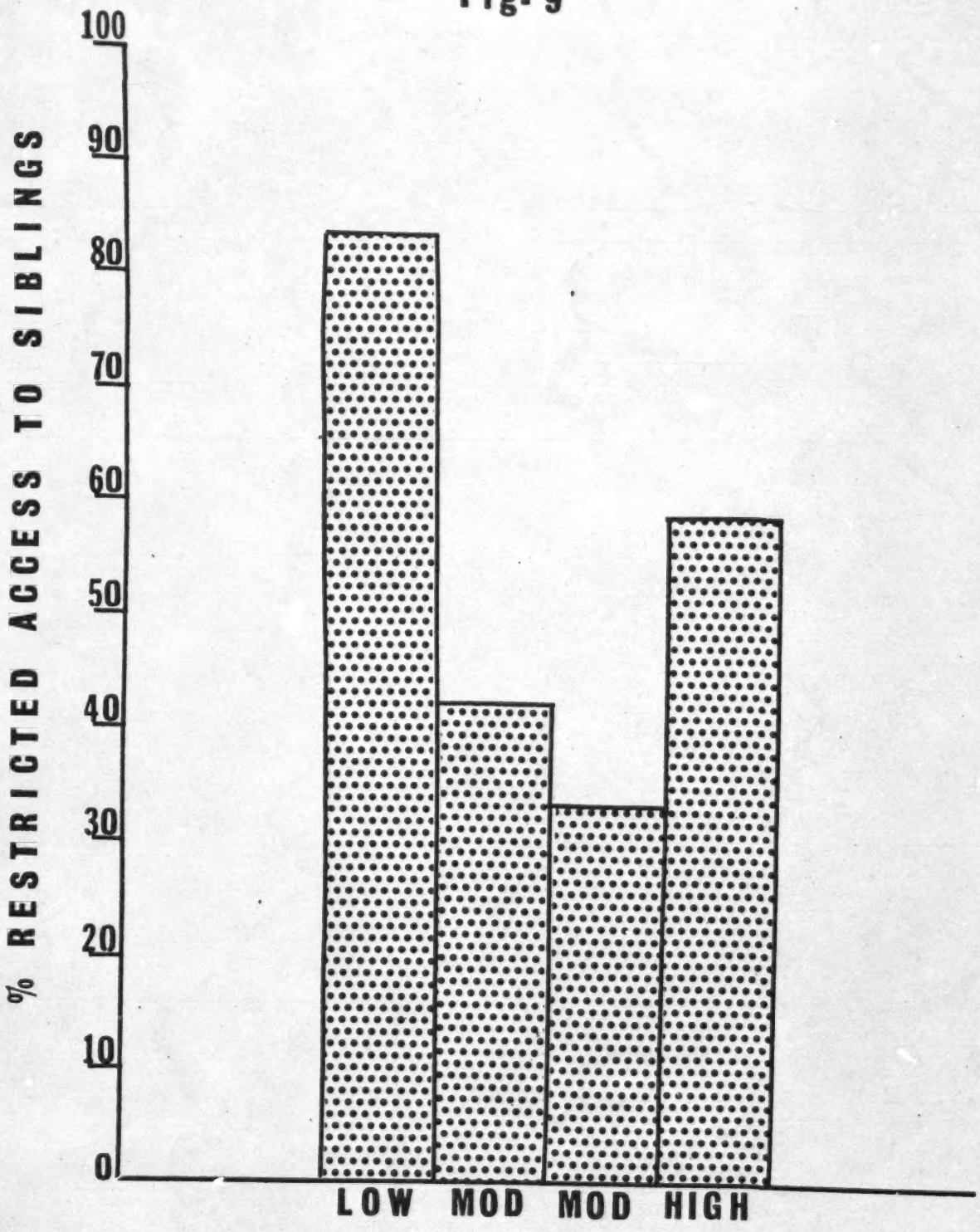
Fig. 8 FAMILY DENSITY

	SMALLER FAMILIES (3-4)	LARGER FAMILIES (5-7)
SMALLER HOMES	MODERATE DENSITY	HIGH DENSITY
LARGER HOMES	LOW DENSITY	MODERATE DENSITY

00015

RESTRICTED BATHROOM ACCESS X FAMILY DENSITY

Fig- 9



FAMILY DENSITY

(Square footage of home x Total number in household)

which one may be private and the psychological need for privacy in highly dense contexts contribute to higher levels of privacy use by children.

Finally, in order to determine whether our privacy data related in sensible ways to the ongoing socialization in the home, we examined the relation between maternal child rearing variables and children's privacy. For the maternal behavioral variables, we utilized the mothers scores on the Fels Parent Behavior Rating Scales that are based on observations of the mothers with their children at regular intervals from infancy through seven years of age. These are ongoing assessments made independently of the privacy measures. The pattern of associations we obtained is represented by the following sample of correlations between pairs of privacy and maternal variables for two to seven year old subjects:

1. Children keeping their bedroom doors open during recreational activities or during entertaining of friends was positively related to ratings of the restrictiveness of regulations imposed by mothers (r=.38) and to the severity of actual punishments imposed by mothers in cases of misconduct (r=.63).
2. Children keeping the bathroom door open while grooming was positively related to the affectionateness of their mother (r=.37).
3. Similarly, keeping the bathroom door open while dressing was positively related to the mother's tendency to be approving in her critical reactions to her child (r=.55).
4. However, keeping the bathroom door open while bathing was negatively related to ratings of the mother's general protectiveness (r=-.42). It has been suggested that this relationship may be a result of protective mothers cautioning their children to guard themselves from drafts and thus from catching colds!
5. Finally, parents, rather than the child, deciding whether the child's bedroom door is to be left open or closed was

positively related to ratings of the coersiveness of the mother's suggestions to the child (r=.28).

In general, then, these child rearing data yield a pattern in which it appears that restrictive and coersive mothers exercise more control over children's privacy habits, and affectionate and approving mothers have children who are less private during personal activities.

In closing, let me point out that this examination of the development of privacy in childhood has provided an excellent verhicle for demonstrating the importance of considering the interactions of developmental, situational, physical space, and socialization variables in the development of children's social behavior. Finally, these findings indicate the usefulness of a multi-assessment approach including physical growth measures, situational measures, behavioral measures and in-situ observational measures for evaluating these interaction effects on children's development.

References

Aiello, J.R. & Jones, S.E. field study of the proxemic behavior of young school children in three subcultural groups. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1971, 19, 351-356.

Altman, I. Some perspectives on the study of man-environment phenomena. Representative Research in Social Psychology, 1973, 4, 109-126.

Altman, I., Nelson, P., & Lett, E.E. The ecology of home environments. Final Report, Project No. 0-0502, Grant No. Oeg-8-70-0202 (508), Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, January, 1972.

Evans, G.W., & Howard, R.B. Personal space. Psychological Bulletin, 1973 80, 334-344.

Fry, A.M., & Willis, F.N. Invasion of personal space as a function of the age of the invader. The Psychological Record, 1971, 21, 385-389.

Ittelson, W.H., Proshansky, H.M., Rivlin, L.G., & Winkel, G.H. An introduction to environmental psychology. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1974.

Loo, C. Important issues in researching the effects of crowding on humans. Representative Research in Social Psychology, 1973, 4, 219-226.

McGrew, W.C. An ethological study of children's behavior. New York: Academic, 1972.

Moos, R.H., & Insel, P.M. Issues in social ecology. Palo Alto, California: National Press Books, 1974.

Pedersen, D.M. Developmental trends in personal space. The Journal of Psychology, 1973, 83, 3-9.

Wolfe, M., & Laufer, R. The concept of privacy in childhood and adolsecence. In S. Margules, (Ed.) Privacy. Stroudsburg, Pa: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, 1974.

Wolfe, M., & Rivlin, L.G. The evolution of space utilization patterns in a children's psychiatric hospital. In W. Mitchell (Ed.) Environmental design: Research and practice. Proceedings of EDRA III Conference. Los Angeles: University of California, 1972.

Note

1. A more detailed version of this paper is available from Ross D. Parke, Fels Research Institute, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387.